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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAKU 000849

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SUBJECT: SENIOR AZERBAIJANI OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO WELCOME U.S.-RUSSIA DISCUSSIONS ON GABALA RADAR

REF: BAKU 00739

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Aliyev continues to send the message that he is waiting for the U.S. and Russia to come to a decision regarding the Gabala radar facility after both sides conclude their missile defense consultations. While other GOAJ officials reiterated this message, some -- including Foreign Minister Mammadyarov and Presidential Advisor Novruz Mammadov -- have encouraged us actively to accept the Russian offer of cooperation on Gabala. Deputy FM Azimov continues to push for trilateral discussions on the use of Gabala, but this appears unsanctioned from both his minister and the President. GOAJ officials have also stressed that there has been no Gabala-related coordination between Baku and Moscow since the June 6 phone call between Presidents Aliyev and Putin, and that the GOAJ had no advance knowledge of President Putin's revised missile defense proposals -- specifically his offer to refurbish Gabala -- made at Kennebunkport. End Summary.

PRESIDENT ALIYEV: THE BALL IS IN YOUR COURT

¶2. (C) During a July 3 meeting with Congressman John Tierney (septel), President Aliyev stressed that he would be careful not to advocate for a particular proposal on missile defense. Instead, he would wait for a signal from the United States once it had completed its talks with Russia.

¶3. (C) Answering Tierney's question regarding the latest status of the Qabala radar station, Aliyev said the offer by the Russia had been "good" for Azerbaijan since it raised the country's international profile. Aliyev added that the announcement had no impact on Azerbaijan and that if it worked, then the Government of Azerbaijan will be glad to be part of the global security process. If the arrangement does not work, however, then Azerbaijan will not suffer since the proposal was not its own. Finally, he stated that if the U.S. and Russia agree, then Azerbaijan "will join" since, according to the 2002 Agreement governing Russia's use of the radar station, Azerbaijan must agree on all third party participation in the station's operations.

¶4. (C) Echoing Aliyev's previous comments to the Ambassador (reftel), Aliyev told Tierney that the Russian offer to the U.S. to use Gabala had come as a "surprise" and did not affect U.S.-Azerbaijan policy. He told Tierney that Putin

had called from his airplane to talk with about the proposal but that the call's reception was poor and he did not get the full details until the proposal was announced at the G8 summit. Aliyev added that the President of Poland expressed concern about the offer and asked Azerbaijan not to encourage the Russian proposal. Aliyev confided to Tierney that prior to the Russian announcement, Azerbaijan had contemplated possibly ending Russia's use of the station per the original agreement in 2012 and not extending Russian involvement. Aliyev said that Azerbaijan "did not benefit from the station and did not need the money from Russia." He stated that when the original contract was signed in 2002, Azerbaijan needed the money but now that was not the case. He concluded by stating that Azerbaijan would prefer to end Russia usage of the station since Russia had no other presence in Azerbaijan.

OTHER OFFICIALS SUGGEST COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA

¶ 15. (C) In contrast to Aliyev's more disinterested approach, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov separately on July 3 encouraged the U.S. to find common ground with the Russians on using the Gabala radar station because such cooperation in Azerbaijan would provide additional security and stability to the region and defuse current tensions between the U.S. and Russia over missile defense. Mammadov went further, saying that the U.S. should consider immediately cooperating with Russia at the Gabala radar station and delay implementation of basing of a missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland by three years. The Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. would not slow down its process of dialogue with Eastern European states over basing of a missile defense

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system.

NOVRUZ MAMMADOV: KEEP US OUT OF IT

¶ 16. (C) In a subsequent July 5 meeting, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov confirmed to Charge that there have been no consultations between Russia and Azerbaijan on missile defense since the June 6 phone call between the two presidents. He said that his government was unaware in advance of Russian President Putin's newest missile defense proposals, including an offer to upgrade the facility at the Gabala radar station.

¶ 17. (C) Mammadov emphasized that Azerbaijan had taken a principled position to support U.S.-Russian cooperation on missile defense at Gabala, but that details are to be worked out with Azerbaijan only if the U.S. and Russia come to some agreement first. If Azerbaijan were to take a position on the concrete proposals currently being discussed, Mammadov said this would only result in increased pressure on Azerbaijan from Iran.

¶ 18. (C) Mammadov praised the beginning of expert-level talks between the U.S. and Russia, but remained skeptical that these talks would result in an agreement to cooperate.

"Russia's concrete goal in making these new proposals is to make sure your plans to build systems in Poland and the Czech Republic are not realized," he added. He suggested that since construction of a missile defense system likely was still years away, the U.S. should consider "striking a bargain" to cooperate with the Russians as a first step and actually look to construct facilities in Poland and the Czech Republic in 2010. Mammadov was pleased that the U.S. and Azerbaijan would discuss Missile Defense as part of the July 9-10 Security Dialogue in Washington.

DEPUTY FM AZIMOV REQUESTS A SEAT AT THE TABLE

¶ 19. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov told Charge on

July 5 that there have been no further discussions between Azerbaijan and Russia on the topic of missile defense since Putin's June 6 phone call to Aliyev. Azimov noted that Presidents Putin and Aliyev did not go into details during their phone conversation, with Putin broadly asking Aliyev if he was open to Putin broaching the idea of U.S.-Russian access to Gabala.

¶10. (C) Azimov also said that while the GOAJ is open to cooperation on Gabala, it would like to be involved in consultations with the U.S. and Russia, either in a bilateral or trilateral forum. He viewed negatively the new Putin proposal to have missile defense discussed in the NATO-Russia Council, as this forum excludes Azerbaijan. Azimov said that he personally favored a trilateral discussion. When asked why his view differed from what President Aliyev has said privately, Azimov responded that "the President needs some education on this issue." Azimov stated that Russia is not inclined to keep Azerbaijan informed of its positions and deliberations on Gabala and, therefore, the GOAJ would appreciate U.S. assistance in ensuring that the GOAJ is closely consulted as the U.S. and Russia consider possible access to Gabala.

¶11. (C) Asked whether Azerbaijan would support joint U.S.-Russia upgrades to Gabala, Azimov responded that this proposal changes the whole dynamic and will have to be studied carefully. While the GOAJ had favored mothballing the Gabala radar station after the ten year lease with Russia expires in 2012, Azimov said the GOAJ would change its view if the U.S. and Russia reach agreement to jointly use the facility. The GOAJ understands the facility is outdated and needs serious upgrades.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) In the days since Putin's meeting with President Bush at Kennebunkport, the GOAJ's position on Gabala does not appear to have changed. Although at Kennebunkport, Putin refined his proposal considerably to include potentially

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upgrading Gabala -- along with other proposals, including broadening missile defense consultations to include the NATO-Russia Council -- the GOAJ's reaction appears unchanged. Deputy FM Azimov, who travels to Washington this week, has reflected views on missile defense and the use of the Gabala radar station which are at odds with the President and the President's Foreign Policy Advisor. These officials seem to want the U.S. and Russia to come to a decision, then consult Azerbaijan to work out the details once the dust has settled.
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